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SPECIALISTS AND THINKERS NOT WANTED

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Every now and then somebody "speaks out in meeting." We do not always agree with what he says. We very likely feel that it is an overemphasis, but nevertheless such people get a hearing. This brief paper sets forth one aspect of our church life which certainly needs correction.

The more study a man does in preparation for the ministry, in many of our denominations, the more does he separate himself from the thinking, or lack of thinking, of the ordinary people of the church. Dr. S. P. Cadman says, "In most cases thinking is an embarrassment to an auditor." If this is true in general, it is distressingly true in conservative churches, where the most important things in the thought line were fixed forever for them one hundred or five hundred years ago.

In medicine all want the best specialism that the age can produce. Even the most conservative man, when his health or the health of his family is threatened inquires concerning a physician, not, "Has he the methods of the well-meaning blunderers who shortened the life of Washington?" but rather, "Is he a thorough specialist and up to date?" The calls of this very week brought to light parents who are highly alarmed if the minister weaves thoughts into his sermon that are less than a hundred years old, yet when the life of their child was threatened by disease, they hastened for the best specialism that the age can produce.

In school work also the people welcome the best knowledge and the most approved methods. The principal is required to be up to date, and the teachers must bring diplomas from the most progressive schools and colleges. A well-known school principal of conservative religious training used to find himself grieved beyond measure if the progressive minister of his church deviated one iota from the time-hallowed ritual and the ancient ceremonies of the denomination, yet in his school work he was always hunting for up-to-date methods and practices. The school never finds it necessary to discharge a man or to push him into some inconspicuous corner of the work because he knows too much or has specialized too carefully.

But in the pulpits of the conservative churches, in a majority of these pulpits at least, the people dread to see expert knowledge and specialism. They fear clear thinking, if it departs from the old orthodoxy, as it often must do these days. The people do not welcome the word of even a conservative higher criticism upon the Bible, or fearless clear thinking in theology. Many congregations become dreadfully uneasy

if they hear the prophetic word of the specialist upon modern social problems.

Much recent experience of our ministers is bringing out the fact that many of our complacent churches have not cared to hear specialists on the war. A good fraction of the listeners in American pulpits have not cared for a Christian specialist in the pulpit, a prophet if you please, to explain to them the causes of the war and the clearly drawn issue between Christ and the old paganism of Thor. They have not cared for an expert to make clear to them the lofty ideals that forced America into the strife. Many of course, through birth or training, have sympathized with the other side, but thousands who are thoroughly American have merely wanted in the pulpit a man who would attempt to bring superficial evidence from the book of Daniel or from the Apocalypse showing when the war will end; or who would attempt to prove from the same sources that Christ is soon to appear to gather his "little flock" to himself.

In the favored places of the land, in the colleges and universities, and in many of our theological schools Christian thought has been making wonderfully gratifying progress in recent years. Those of us who have had the trying, yet joyful experience of being pioneers have been greatly comforted of late by becoming aware that we are no longer alone. The thinking world is abreast or already in advance of us. But the rank and file of church people have made no such progress. On the contrary, they are greatly pained at any signs of vital thought that they detect or surmise on the part of their leaders. Conservatism is deeply entrenched among com-

mon men and is good for another hundred years or more. It is lying in wait for the progressive spirit to spot it and "squelch" it.

The young minister, therefore, who comes forth eagerly from one of our seminaries where the open mind is encouraged to enter the pulpit of the average church, expecting that the whole world is waiting to receive his wonderfully satisfying, and enlightening message, is frequently doomed to bitter disappointment. The church is waiting for no such thing. Rather it is grimly waiting to bend the young upstart back into the line of orthodoxy and conformity. It does not believe any more than Nazareth did in any inspiration that requires change, or hard thinking, or sacrifice.

The minister who meets these conditions has several lines of progress before him. He may go into a more liberal denomination. This is carrying coal to Newcastle, as his progressive measures are not needed there, yet hundreds choose this path. It is no doubt the path of least resistance and the comfortable thing to do. Or the young minister may continue to carry on unabated his liberal propaganda in his own denomination, until his spirit is broken by the persistence and the bitterness of the assaults against him. Perhaps the keenest shaft that conservatism sends against him is to deny him any right to use the name Christian. This thrust goes deep for the earnest youth, since he knows that his one aim is to be like his Master. Another plan for the prophet of progress is to resort to camouflage and to dispense the new ideas in a diluted manner, very diluted, until the people are liberalized in some measure in spite of them-

selves. This plan is not hypocrisy but merely good strategy on the part of the knowing teacher, and very often it has marked success. Jesus used it in his matchless parables. His disciples and apostles may use it too if they have the ability, for did he not tell them to "be wise as serpents and harmless as doves"? This plan, however, has one serious limitation. In so many congregations there is sure to be a man who took his theological training forty years ago and let it petrify in his system. He prides himself on being able to spot irregularity in the pulpit, and then, with much show of confidence, he tells the simple-minded people that their minister is unsafe. Thereafter the pastor wonders at the changed attitude of some of his best friends. Perhaps the *best* plan that the progressive minister can adopt is to direct his chief energies toward the young people in the Bible school and in the young people's societies. Here are minds and hearts in touch with the up-to-date methods in the public schools and therefore unafraid of life and growth in the church. And in any case youth is so fresh from the hands of the Creator that it finds more joy in the *living* God, revealed in a genuine and progressive

pastor, than in petrified ceremonies or a dead theology.

There are then without question great opportunities before the well-trained youth fresh from one of our modern seminaries. The average church does not want his methods or his message, but it sorely needs both. The saints lift hands in horror at his way of handling the Scriptures, but the young people of the church must have the advantage of his emphasis upon Christian conduct rather than upon the worship of the tribal Gods of the Old Testament.

And happy is that minister of the progressive thought who has a good sprinkling of college students in his congregation, youths outgrowing the old theology and groping their way toward the new. To take these restless minds and anchor them to the living, loving God whom Jesus revealed is a task that angels might well covet. And when the orthodox faith shall find itself, through the experiences and lessons of the Great War, rudely wrenched loose from some of its infallibles, it too may condescend to give heed to the Christian scholar, and historian, and specialist, in order to find its way to the living God and to the gospel of brotherhood.